

Islands Alone: A Look at How the German Invasion and Occupation of the
Channel Islands Affected the Lives of the Channel Islanders and German
Soldiers on the Channel Islands During World War II

by
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A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

Honors College

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Animal Science
(Honors Associate)

Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in History
(Honors Associate)

Presented May 23, 2016
Commencement June 2016

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Gus Paoli for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Animal Science and Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in History presented on May 23, 2016. Title: Islands Alone: A Look at How the German Invasion and Occupation of the Channel Islands Affected the Lives of the Channel Islanders and German Soldiers on the Channel Islands During World War II.

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The Channel Islands were the only part of the United Kingdom occupied by Germany during World War II. The Occupation began on June 30, 1940 and ended almost five years later on May 9, 1945. The Occupation is divided into four phases: pre-invasion, invasion, occupation and isolation, and liberation. The first phase, pre-invasion, consists of the early stages of World War II when the Channel Islands were under British control. The second phase, invasion of the Islands, includes the German invasion plans, the surrender of the Channel Islands, and the reaction to the invasion. The third phase, occupation and isolation, was the longest and focuses on the plight of the Channel Islanders under German rule. The final phase, liberation, started on May 9, 1945 when the Channel Islands were liberated by the British. My research examined how the Islanders lived during World War II, how the Islanders resisted the Germans, and how the Germans viewed the Islands, both as a propaganda victory and as a military fortress. The Channel Islands will always be set apart from the rest of the United Kingdom because of the unique challenges their inhabitants faced while being occupied during World War II.

Key Words: World War II, Channel Islands, Alderney Concentration Camp, Nazi Germany, occupation

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May 23, 2016

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Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Animal Science and Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in History project of Gus Paoli presented on May 23, 2016.

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Acknowledgements

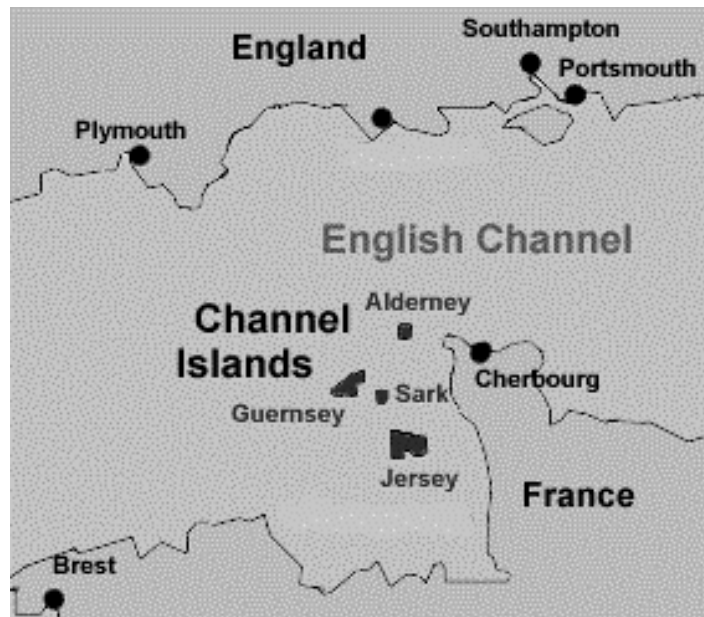
Paul Kopperman Ph.D. for helping me decide on a thesis topic and guiding me through my research and writing.

Kara Ritzheimer Ph.D. and Christopher Nichols Ph.D. for being committee members and encouraging me throughout my project.

My mom, dad, and sister for having to listen to me talk endlessly about World War II for the past ten years!

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The Channel Islands are four small islands that are part of the United Kingdom and are located off the coast of France.

Introduction

The Channel Islands are a small corner of the United Kingdom consisting of the islands Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, and Sark. The islands are located in the English Channel several miles off the coast of the Cotentin Peninsula in the Normandy region of France. During World War II, the Channel Islands faced a different struggle than Great Britain because the four small islands were invaded and occupied by the Germans, while Great Britain suffered massive air raids but no invasion. The occupation of the Channel Islands was the only time during World War II that Germany occupied part of the United Kingdom. The occupation had a large effect on the Islanders (both those who lived through it and those who were evacuated to Great Britain) and the German soldiers who were stationed on the Islands. Each of these groups endured hardships and they viewed the occupation differently. Throughout the occupation, the Islanders lived under new laws and restrictions set up by the Germans, and both the soldiers and Islanders faced hardships such as food and fuel shortages. This paper will examine how the Islanders lived during World War II, how the Islanders resisted the Germans, and how the Germans viewed the Islands, both as a propaganda victory and as a military fortress.

The occupation of the Channel Islands went through several phases as the course of the war changed. The first phase, pre-invasion, consists of the early stages of World War II when the Channel Islands were under British control. This phase began on September 1, 1939 and ended with the start of the Battle of France on May 10, 1940. The second phase, invasion of the Islands,

occurred from June through September 1940 and includes the German invasion plans, the surrender of the Channel Islands, and the reaction to the invasion.

The third phase, occupation and isolation, was the longest phase and focuses on the plight of the Channel Islands under German rule, lasting from October 1940 to May 1945. The Channel Islands were surrendered to the British in early May 1945, bringing about the final phase, liberation. When World War II began on September 1, 1939, no one could have imagined that the Channel Islands would be occupied by the Germans for five long years.

Pre-Invasion

Early World War II Under British Control

As the 1930's progressed and Europe drew closer to war, the people living on the Channel Islands were not overly concerned with events on the continent. Even after war was declared, it was feared that the Channel Islands might be bombed, but most residents believed that the Islands would be largely ignored by the Germans. As the British Expeditionary Force fortified their positions in France, it seemed impossible that the Germans would advance to the Cotentin Peninsula and attack the Islands.¹ The Channel Islands were believed to be a safe place to sit out the war, and some English mothers tried to send their children to boarding school on the Islands because they believed that it would be safer than remaining in England.² The only sign of the war was that military-aged men were enlisting in the military and several military training camps were being set up on the Islands. The Channel Islands' militias were disbanded in order to allow more men to sign up for the regular army.³

The Channel Islands were advertised as the perfect place to escape the war and an ideal vacation spot for the summer of 1940. During the summer, the farmers living on the Islands were busy tending their fields and raising their cattle when the calm was shattered by the German invasion of France.⁴ Within a fortnight most of the British Expeditionary Force had been encircled by the Germans at Dunkirk in northern France and were evacuated back to England.

After the Dunkirk Evacuation, there were still several thousand Allied soldiers trapped in southern France and along the French coast. The Channel Islands played a key role in the evacuation of 21,474 Allied soldiers from the nearby French port of St. Malo.⁵ This evacuation on June 17, 1940 saved the Allied soldiers from the Germans and allowed them to continue to fight. The evacuations caused rumors to spread on the Channel Islands that the population would be evacuated to England and that ships were being sent to help evacuate civilians.

However, the British Government was confused about what to do with the Channel Islands, and the different government departments proposed several conflicting plans. The War Office believed that if the Channel Islands were disarmed, the Germans would leave the Islands alone. The Home Office wanted the demilitarization announcement to be made at once to prevent an attack, but the War Office thought that demilitarization would be too presumptuous and allow the Germans to capture the Islands unopposed. The Director of Sea Transport misunderstood what the Home Office wanted and erroneously thought the Home Office did not want an evacuation. Meanwhile, a junior member of the Sea

Transport Department informed the Bailiffs of Jersey and Guernsey that ships would be provided for an evacuation. While all this was happening, the Ministry of Home Security issued a statement that only women and children could leave the Islands. To further confuse and worry the Islanders, the soldiers that had been evacuated from France did not stay on the Islands but left for England.⁶

Some of the Channel Islands' residents were evacuated, but it was a confusing affair that was managed differently on all four islands. Alderney's entire population of 1,400 was evacuated to Guernsey or England, with the people leaving behind pets, farm animals, and most of their possessions.⁷ Sybil Hathaway, the Dame of Sark, decided that the Sark Island population of 471 people would stay on the island regardless of what happened, because as she explained it, "One does not leave one's land."⁸ The evacuations of Jersey and Guernsey were much more confusing and the decision to leave was made at the family and individual level. Bill Morvan, who was a ten-year-old resident of Jersey in 1940, explained that his father and grandfather decided to stay so they would not lose their business. However, they insisted that Bill, his mother, and his grandmother would be evacuated. While they were waiting to be evacuated, Bill's grandmother became so frustrated with the slow pace she decided that the entire family would stay on the island.⁹ Several families made last minute decisions to evacuate, even leaving hot meals on the table. Along with people, the banks on the Islands had their gold taken to England to prevent it from being confiscated by the Germans.

Even though the Islands had been disarmed and partially evacuated, the Germans were unaware that the Islands had been declared “open towns” and would offer no resistance.¹⁰ It is unknown why the British did not inform the Germans about the demilitarization that happened on June 24, 1940. The two dominant theories are that the British did not want to encourage the Germans to invade if they had not intended to, or that in the confusion, a message had never been sent by the British Government.¹¹ Whatever the reason, not informing the Germans had terrible consequences because on June 28, 1940, the Channel Islands were bombed by the Luftwaffe (German Air Force).

Six Heinkel He 111s (German medium bombers) flew over the Channel Islands and bombed the ports of Saint Helier (Jersey) and Saint Peter Port (Guernsey), as well as other areas of the Islands. As the planes flew above the Channel Islands, they fired machine guns indiscriminately, even firing on civilian homes. In total, 44 civilians were killed and many more were wounded. The Luftwaffe bombed the Channel Islands to test the Islands’ defenses and to attack a number of trucks sitting at St. Peter Port. These trucks did not contain military equipment like the Germans believed; they were in fact loaded with tomatoes waiting for shipment to England.¹² The only resistance offered by Guernsey was that three ships in the harbor fired their guns at the attackers. The Captain of the SS *Isle of Sark*, Hervy Golding, was awarded the Order of the British Empire and several other medals from the Southern Railway Company for his actions that day. Golding kept sailors and passengers calm during the attack, and he walked across the quayside to telephone the Royal Navy to report the attack. After the

attack ended, Golding sailed the *Isle of Sark* back to England with 647 evacuees and she was the last civilian British ship to visit the Channel Islands until the war ended.¹³

In Great Britain, both *The Times* and the BBC explained the bombing of the Channel Islands as a war crime because the Islands were demilitarized and were not defended by the British. The bombing of the Channel Islands caused anger, confusion, and fear amongst the Islanders. Many citizens knew that the Islands were defenseless and were appalled that the Germans had bombed “open towns” and many were worried about what would happen next.¹⁴ The Germans were unaware of the demilitarization of the Islands until June 30th, two days after the bombings. Since the Germans thought there were still British military personnel on the Islands, they believed the bombing was justified.

Invasion

Invasion of the Channel Islands

The Germans did not expect to take the Channel Islands unopposed and expected fierce resistance from the Royal Army, Air Force, and Navy. Since the Islands were surrounded by water, the responsibility for their capture went to the Kriegsmarine (German Navy). The original invasion plan used six infantry battalions: one for Alderney, two for Guernsey, and three for Jersey. The invasion, which was named Operation Green Arrows, would take place over two days with Guernsey and Alderney being invaded first, followed by Jersey on day

two. The Germans lacked proper invasion barges, so the assault troops would be ferried from France on barges confiscated from French citizens.¹⁵

The lack of opposition to the air raid on June 28, 1940 lead the Germans to scale down their invasion plans, instead utilizing two battalions, one each for Guernsey and Jersey, and one company for Alderney. The invasion plans drawn up by the Kriegsmarine were unnecessary because, much to their annoyance, the Luftwaffe conducted a reconnaissance flight which resulted in the Islands surrendering to the Luftwaffe.¹⁶

Hauptmann (equivalent rank to RAF Flight Lieutenant) Liebe-Pieteritz, a German pilot, landed his Dornier Do 17 bomber at the Guernsey Airport while the remaining three airplanes in his squadron circled overhead. Finding the airport deserted, he decided to have a look around and explore the buildings. After flying back to France and reporting the lack of resistance, an invasion party of Luftwaffe personnel flew to Guernsey to secure the airport. This second landing was met by Inspector William Scuipher who was in charge of Guernsey's police force. Scuipher gave the German commander, Major Hessel, a note which declared the Islands undefended. Meanwhile, the Bailiff of Guernsey was calling the Home Office in London to inform them of the arrival of the Germans.¹⁷ With the capture of Guernsey, the Germans were able to quickly land troops on the other Islands, starting the occupation which would last until May 1945.

Reaction to the Invasion

The invasion of the Channel Islands caused a variety of reactions among the Islanders, the Germans, and the British. Many Islanders were angry that the United Kingdom had abandoned them, while others understood that defending Great Britain was more important and that the Channel Islands had little strategic value. Still other Islanders felt that the capture had allowed the Germans to advance closer to England without any fight or opposition.¹⁸

In London, the War Office stood behind their decision to abandon the Islands even though the United Kingdom had a strong Navy and Air Force who were capable and willing to fight the Germans. One member of the House of Lords, Lord Portsea, after hearing that the Islands were abandoned because they had been too difficult to defend, exclaimed, "Fancy a British Government, an English Government, saying the odds were too great!"¹⁹ Prime Minister Winston Churchill wanted an immediate commando²⁰ raid launched to liberate the Islands. He believed that if commandos were launched forthwith they could overpower the Germans who could not bring in reinforcements fast enough to hold the Islands.²¹ In Berlin, the Germans took advantage of their victory for propaganda purposes and wasted no time showing pictures of German soldiers walking along British streets and buying goods in British shops on the Channel Islands.

Early British Commando Raids and Spy Landings

Guernsey was the first Island to be visited by the Royal Army when Lieutenant Hubert Nicolle was transported to the Islands via submarine for a two

day reconnaissance mission. Lieutenant Nicolle was chosen for the mission because he was a Guernsey native. The first people he set out to make a connection with were his parents who gathered information and made contacts for him. Nicolle could not obtain the information himself because many people knew he had left to join the army, and it would have been very suspicious if he was seen walking around the island. Returning to his parents' house was a smart move for Nicolle because his father worked for the state and could summarize and explain all the restrictions put on the Islanders. His uncle was the harbormaster in Saint Peter Port and knew details of what was being transported to and from the Islands. One of Nicolle's friends ran a store that was selling and distributing food to the Germans, so he could estimate the number of German troops and knew where their living areas were located. After his mission was completed, Nicolle returned to the beach and was picked up by the submarine.²²

At the same time Nicolle was picked up, the submarine dropped off two other Guernseymen, Phillip Martell and Desmond Mulholland. These men were to act as guides for a British commando raid several days later. This commando raid had two main objectives: 1) to seize the airfield and destroy any German airplanes or petrol stores, and 2) to attack German barracks and a machine gun post in order to capture prisoners and confiscate documents. However, the raid did not go as planned due to bad weather; only one group landed on Guernsey, and because they were on the wrong beach, they could not find their target. Martell and Mulholland were left stranded on Guernsey waiting for the

commandos or a Royal Navy boat to take them back to England. They waited for one week, and after their rations were used up, decided to surrender to the Germans. However, because Martell and Mulholland were both in civilian clothes, they could be executed as spies. The two men went to Ambrose Sherwill's house to get help. Sherwill was President of the Controlling Committee and was responsible for running the Island government, as well as being the main contact for the German authorities.²³

To help Martell and Mulholland, Sherwill had to find Royal Army uniforms. There were still some Guernsey Militia uniforms stored at the town arsenal that the men could wear in order to pass off as Royal Army soldiers. After getting the uniforms, Sherwill realized that the buttons on the uniforms were Guernsey Militia not Royal Army. After a quick search, Royal Army buttons were found and sewn on the uniforms, and Martell and Mulholland changed into them. Sherwill then called the German Army Headquarters and explained that two British soldiers had surrendered to him and were waiting to be picked up. The Germans were suspicious and wondered how the men had gotten ashore and not been seen walking around Guernsey. Sherwill explained that the two men had changed into civilian clothes upon landing. Martell and Mulholland were taken to a POW camp in France and the Germans were not suspicious of the Islanders and that they might be helping British soldiers.²⁴

One event that caused the Germans to become suspicious occurred when Lieutenant Hubert Nicolle returned to Guernsey with James Symes, another soldier from Nicolle's regiment. Their mission was to gather intelligence for the

British Government on the treatment of the civilian population and the movement of goods to and from the Islands. Nicolle and Symes landed safely and were able to gather the needed information successfully. When they went to the beach to meet the torpedo boat that was supposed to take them to England, it never came. Nicolle and Symes decided to wait until the next new moon in the hope that the boat would come then. During this time, a third agent named John Parker was captured on the Islands. Parker's capture caused the Germans to become suspicious of the Islander's and believe that many people might be sheltering soldiers or spies. After a conversation between Ambrose Sherwill and a German officer responsible for the capture of British soldiers, amnesty was offered to all soldiers who surrendered and the civilians who had sheltered them. Even after this announcement, Nicolle and Symes wanted to remain in hiding, but a retired Royal Army general advised them to surrender while they had the chance. However, a high ranking German officer in Paris altered the conditions of the deal. Believing that there were still British soldiers and spies on the Channel Islands, the German officer ordered that 20 British citizens be shot along with Nicolle and Symes if there were no more surrenders. Radios were also confiscated and Ambrose Sherwill was arrested.²⁵ The Commander in Chief of the Channel Islands, Fritz Bandelow, convinced his superiors that the amnesty offered by the Germans should be honored and all the prisoners were released except for Nicolle and Symes who spent the rest of the war in POW camps.

The residents of the Channel Islands were angry with the British government for abandoning the Islanders when they demilitarized the Islands.

Then the British Government made the Islanders' situation worse by sending commandos to attack the Germans who were stationed on the Islands. Many of the Islanders felt that the British should have left them alone rather than making the situation more difficult by launching commando raids against the Germans. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill even admitted that the raids had been "silly fiascos" because no objectives had been met or useful military information gathered.²⁶ Even though there were several other raids later in the war, none affected the Islanders as much as the first three raids.

Occupation and Isolation

Restrictions Placed on the Islanders

As soon as the occupation started, the Islanders had restrictions placed upon them by the Germans. Curfew was established and people had to remain in their homes between 11 pm and 6 am. The clocks on the Islands were advanced one hour to bring them into the same time zone as Germany and France. All boats had to be registered and could not sail without a permit. Personal cars were banned, but emergency and service vehicles were allowed and drivers were given a permit to buy fuel. The Islanders also had to surrender all weapons and ammunition to the Germans.²⁷ There are some accounts of civilians being allowed to keep souvenirs such as antique guns or weapons obtained during their military service. Jack Sauvary, who lived on Guernsey, wrote about the order to surrender weapons in his diary. He writes that he saw a large crowd gathered in front of the Royal Hotel (the designated collection area) and was amazed to see the number and variety of weapons that were to be

handed over. Mr. Sauvary took his revolvers to give them to the Germans, and the German officer examined them and replied, "Cuiros (meaning an old or antique gun) I suppose, oh you can take them back."²⁸

Another restriction placed on the Channel Islanders was the confiscation of radios by the Germans. Initially, the Islanders were able to keep their radios except for a brief period during 1940 after Lieutenant Nicolle and James Symes were captured. The Germans banned radios in 1942 and ordered all the Islanders to surrender their radios because the war was starting to turn against Germany. If an Islander was caught listening to a radio, they could be imprisoned or sent to an internment camp.²⁹ Despite this risk, many Islanders kept their radios or found other ways to hear the news. One family turned in an old radio, while keeping their new one hidden under the floorboards of a church and the Germans never suspected it was there. Other Islanders who had surrendered their radios made their own crystal radios. Donald Le Gallais, a resident of Jersey, became very skilled at making radios and he started a secret business selling radios to fellow Islanders.³⁰ Listening to the radio and spreading news about the war was one of the most common acts of resistance by the Islanders against the Germans.

Food Shortages on the Channel Islands

The restriction that impacted the Islanders most was the food shortages on the Islands. Food began to be a problem in late 1942 and early 1943 and people started stealing food from farmers and from each other. It was common for farmers to report the theft of small animals such as rabbits and chickens. The

thieves could be anyone from Islanders to German soldiers to escaped slave workers from Alderney Concentration Camp. The food shortages caused people to experiment with new foods such as seaweed and Carrageen moss.³¹

The food situation became even more treacherous in late 1944 due to the Allied invasion of France. When the Allies invaded France, food could no longer be imported due to a blockade of the Islands. In November 1944, it was estimated that the Islands only had enough food to last one or two months. Both Islanders and German soldiers were on the edge of starvation and something had to be done to help prevent civilians from starving. The Bailiffs of Jersey and Guernsey sent letters to the International Red Cross in Switzerland asking for aid. On December 27, 1944, the Red Cross Ship *SS Vega* arrived with 100,000 food parcels for the Islanders. The *Vega* returned to the Channel Islands several times before the war ended to supply the civilian population of the Islands with more food.³²

While the civilians were getting food from the Red Cross, the German soldiers were trying to survive on meager rations. In order to survive, German soldiers resorted to stealing dogs, cats, rabbits, chickens, and other small animals to cook. Brian Read, who was a teenager on Jersey during the occupation, recalls Germans stealing his family's cat to eat. Other Islanders recall that when the Germans first landed, "They were the cream of the German Army, proud and tall. At the end they were old men poking about in dustbins for scraps of food".³³

Resistance of the Islanders

The Channel Islands stand apart from the other occupied European countries, not only because they were British territory but because of a lack of organized resistance fighters against the Germans. Many Islanders are quick to explain why there was very little resistance: the Islands lack of strategic value, too many German soldiers on the Islands during the occupation, 10,000 Islanders served in the military during the war and were stationed in other parts of the world, and resistance would have achieved nothing and would not have had any impact on the War.³⁴ Another possible reason for the lack of a resistance movement is that there was nowhere for resistance fighters to hide on the Islands. In France, the French resistance could retreat into the countryside or hide in cities to evade the Germans. In comparison, the land area of all the Channel Islands is only 76.5 square miles, making it very easy for a resistance group to be tracked down.

Instead of an active resistance, many Islanders performed acts of passive resistance, such as listening to illegal radios, painting the "V" for victory symbol in public places, and small acts of sabotage. The most famous act of passive resistance occurred in 1943 during the funeral for sailors from the Royal Navy cruiser HMS *Charybdis*. The cruiser was sunk in October 1943 and afterwards 21 bodies washed up on the shores of Guernsey and Sark. The Germans held a public funeral on November 17, 1943 and the Islanders took the opportunity to show their support for the United Kingdom. Jack Sauvay, a resident of Guernsey, was present at the funeral and recorded it in his diary. He writes that

he saw thousands of civilians attending the funeral along with an honor guard of 80 German soldiers. After the funeral, the German commander and the Bailiff of Guernsey laid the first two wreaths down on the graves followed by the Islanders. Mr. Sauvary estimated that there were over 700 wreaths placed on the sailors' graves by the Islanders.³⁵ This strong show of support from the Islanders concerned the Germans, and even though they continued to bury Allied servicemen with full military honors, the Islanders were banned from attending the funerals.³⁶ During the funeral for several American airmen in January 1944, Mr. Sauvary noted the change in the German attitude. At this funeral, no flags or flowers were present and only six Islanders were allowed to attend.³⁷

In 1941, the residents of the Channel Islands participated in the "V" campaign. The goal of this campaign was to cover Western Europe in the letter "V", and this letter was chosen because it stood for victory in English, French, and Flemish. The campaign started when the BBC broadcast instructions to the residents of occupied countries to paint or chalk the "V" sign in public places such as on walls, signs, buildings, and fence posts. When the "V" sign started appearing on the Islands, both adults and children were questioned by police and German authorities, and several arrests were made. The punishment for putting up "V" signs could be severe and several Islanders were sent to French prisons as punishment. In a controversial move the local governments of the Channel Islands offered a reward of £25 to anyone who could offer information leading to the arrest of anyone caught drawing a "V" sign. Though £25 seems like a miniscule amount today, it was worth almost three months wages in 1941. To

destroy the effectiveness of the “V” campaign, the Germans used the letter themselves, saying that it stood for “Viktoria”, an old German word for victory. The Germans started putting up their own “V” signs and the Channel Islands’ “V” campaign lost its effectiveness.³⁸

The Islanders also showed support indiscreetly by displaying a British flag openly in their sitting room, by playing songs such as “The White Cliffs of Dover”, or making comments showing their support of the Allies in front of, or to German soldiers.³⁹ These small acts of resistance could cause the Islanders to be punished if the Germans discovered and reported them. Other Islanders took a larger part in resisting the Germans. Charles Roche, the controller of the Jersey Airport, ordered the chief groundsman to cut the grass shorter than the normal four inches. When asked why the grass was short, Roche explained that the grass on Jersey grew very fast and it needed to be kept short. Roche hoped that the German planes would slide off the end of the runway and be damaged when they were landing. It is believed that 28 planes were damaged before the Germans got frustrated about their airplanes sliding off the runway and began to cut the grass themselves.⁴⁰

The Channel Islands’ Jewish Population

The majority of the Jewish population living on the Channel Islands fled to England during the evacuation, leaving only sixteen Jewish people on the Islands, twelve on Jersey and four on Guernsey. The Germans set out to identify Jews shortly after they invaded. A Jew was defined as: 1) any person having at least three grandparents of pure Jewish blood, 2) any person having two

grandparents of pure Jewish blood and who belongs to the Jewish religious community or any person who is married to a Jew. Jews were not allowed to own businesses or to provide services such as: retail, lodging, catering, insurance, navigation, dispatch, guides, or banking. Jews were also prohibited from being a higher official in any business or an employee who comes into contact with customers. The Germans wanted all Jewish employees to be fired and replaced with non-Jews.⁴¹ When these first anti-Jewish laws were passed in October 1940, many of the residents of the Channel Islands were not concerned because they believed that all the Jews living on the Islands had left.⁴² Some residents tried to help their Jewish friends. For example, one Islander bought his Jewish friend's shop and then gave it back after the war.

After World War II ended, the governments of the Islands were heavily criticized for their willing cooperation with the Germans and their persecution of the small Jewish population that remained on the Channel Islands. The German records that still survive show that the Islands' officials replied to the German requests promptly and without protest, paying close attention to the details and following the German's directions exactly. Not all government officials went along with the Germans' orders; Jersey clerk Bob Le Sueur recalls, "I was horrified when the Jews had to register. I still feel that it was bad but the Germans might have taken hostages if they had refused."⁴³ Mr. Le Sueur was right to be worried and concerned because in 1942 and 1943 most of the Jewish people living on the Channel Islands were deported to German concentration camps in Germany, France, and Poland.

The first deportations began in April 1942 when three Jewish women, Auguste Spitz, Marianne Grunfield, and Therese Steiner, were ordered to report to the German Headquarters on Guernsey. One Police Clerk Sergeant remembers having to tell Therese Steiner the news that she would soon be deported. During an interview after the War, he recalled, "Therese coming into the office, where I conveyed to her the instructions given to the Guernsey Police by the German Military Authorities. Therese became extremely distressed, bursting into tears, and exclaiming that I would never see her again."⁴⁴ These three women were the first to be deported from the Channel Islands because all three women were both Jewish and not British citizens. After their deportation, the three women were first sent to an internment camp in the town of Drancy near Paris, France. On July 20, 1942, they were among the 824 people loaded onto a train and sent to Auschwitz, where they were murdered on or around July 23rd.⁴⁵ In February 1943, the remaining thirteen Jewish residents on the Channel Islands were deported to internment camps in France and Germany. The Jews in the second deportation were not sent to death camps, but to civilian internment camps where conditions were better and most survived the war.⁴⁶

On the Channel Islands, the fate of the three women was unknown for over forty years. Karl Steiner, who is Therese Steiner's brother, survived the Holocaust by hiding in Austria where he was living when the war broke out. He first learned about his sister's fate in January 1993 when vacationing in the United Kingdom. Steiner heard a news story that new records had been found on Guernsey confirming the fate of his sister and the two other women. Mr.

Steiner then traveled to Guernsey and spoke to several people about Therese. One phone call was from the policeman who had arrested her and handed her off to the Germans. He was extremely upset with what had happened and while apologizing explained, "If I'd known what was going to happen to her, I would have hidden her in my house."⁴⁷

Not all of the Jewish people living on the Channel Islands were caught by the Germans. There are accounts of Islanders sheltering Jewish friends from the Germans. Albert Bedane, who hid his friend Mary Richardson from the Germans, was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations⁴⁸ by Israel in January 2000. Another Islander, Dorothea Weber, sheltered Hedwig Bercu during the war. To avoid capture, Miss Bercu faked her own death and was sheltered by Miss Weber for 18 months. In an interesting twist, Miss Bercu was also helped by a German soldier who brought extra food to the two women. Dorothea Weber has also been nominated for Righteous Among the Nations, and her case is still being reviewed.⁴⁹ Other Islanders helped Jews by sheltering and feeding slave laborers who had escaped from Alderney Concentration Camp.

Alderney Concentration Camp and Organisation Todt

The most horrific part of the Occupation occurred on the Island of Alderney and in the Organisation Todt⁵⁰ labor camps. These camps were built to house foreign slave workers (prisoners) who the Germans brought from Europe to build defenses on the Islands. Many of the slave workers died during the war due to inhumane treatment. On October 20, 1941, Hitler decided that the

Channel Islands would become fortress islands and were to be heavily defended. It is widely believed that Hitler made this decision because he wanted to keep the Islands at all costs.⁵¹ The Islands ended up being one of the most heavily fortified points along the Atlantic Wall and these fortifications were the main reason the Allies never attempted to retake the Islands. If an Allied invasion had occurred, a large numbers of civilians would have been killed or wounded in the fighting.

To build the fortress Islands, the Germans needed an army of workers, and they used prisoners from their captured territories to fill this need. The prisoners came from France, Spanish Republicans, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Holland, and Russia.⁵² These workers lived under horrendous conditions, often being forced to work long hours and being fed very little. Many Islanders were horrified when they came across the workers and could not believe that the Germans, who often seemed nice to the Islanders, could act so horribly to the slave laborers. The workers lived in filthy conditions, often in overcrowded houses, where disease and lice were common.⁵³

The conditions on Alderney were even worse where workers could be beaten, hung, or flogged for the smallest offense. One worker recalls that another worker receiving twenty lashes for walking several steps away from his work location. Another worker was caught stealing some potato peelings from a trash can and had his skull crushed by an SS guard for the crime. Many of the deaths were not officially reported as executions, but were listed on the death certificate as “accident” or “suicide”.⁵⁴ The total number of deaths that occurred

on the Islands is unknown due to lack of records, overestimates of deaths, unmarked graves, or bodies being thrown into the sea. However, estimates for deaths range between 400-5,000, with the most accurate estimates ranging between 2,000 and 3,000.⁵⁵

After the war, only four men were tried for war crimes: one Soviet kapo⁵⁶ was tried by Russia and sentenced to twenty five years hard labor in 1949, one SS officer was tried and executed by East Germany in 1963, and two Organisation Todt officers were sentenced to seven to ten years imprisonment by France in 1949.⁵⁷ Oddly, the British tried no one even though the crimes occurred on their territory. One explanation for this is that there was confusion about jurisdiction because the crimes had occurred on British soil, but were against foreign citizens. Part of the confusion was due to the Moscow Declaration of October 1943 which said that the trials of war criminals should be conducted by the most aggrieved nation but in a location near the crimes. The British interpreted this to mean that they should investigate the crimes, but hand the war criminals over to the Russians if there was evidence that Russia had suffered the most.⁵⁸ In the confusion of late 1945 and early 1946, the Allies were swamped with the number of war crime accusations and did not have the manpower to investigate them all. By the time the Alderney cases were being reviewed, cooperation between the British and Soviets had ended, and the British were anxious to sweep the matter under the rug. Many of the suspected war criminals were later released without any serious attempt to bring them to justice.

Collaboration of the Channel Islanders

Many Islanders worked directly or indirectly for the Germans. Shopkeepers and farmers sold goods and food to Germans; other Islanders, such as government officials and policemen, worked closely with the Germans. After the war, the cooperation between the Islands' governments and the Germans became a major controversy. The civilian government employees had to walk a fine line between protecting the Islanders and obeying the Germans. Although the Islanders cooperated with the Germans, they were not viewed as traitors and were not charged with treason by the United Kingdom. Most historians believe that the Islanders collaborated with the Germans to the same extent as governments and citizens in other countries occupied by Germany.⁵⁹ The Channel Islands were the only part of the United Kingdom occupied during the War, and most British citizens did not share the same World War II experiences as the Islanders because Great Britain was not occupied by Germany.

Immediately after the liberation of the Channel Islands, some of the Islanders were punished by other Islanders for collaborating with the Germans. Ginger Lou, a known collaborator, provided the Germans with the names of Islanders who had hidden radios. During the occupation, she also stole clothes, shoes, and jewelry from abandoned houses. After the liberation, she was almost lynched by a mob of angry Islanders. However, her life was saved when a patrol of British soldiers came to her aid and arrested her in order to get her out of the situation.⁶⁰

Another group of Islanders that became outcasts after the war was women who had affairs and relationships with German soldiers. In the days right after liberation, several of these women were attacked by mobs and were beaten or had their heads shaved.⁶¹ Businessmen who had catered to Germans were also attacked, and in some cases, had their stores looted. The Islands' and British governments were both trying to investigate accounts of collaboration but were overwhelmed with cases. As time progressed, people rebuilt their lives, and it was uncommon to hear someone accused of being a collaborator.

German Soldiers View of the Occupation

When the Germans invaded the Channel Islands, thousands of military personnel arrived to man the new airbases, navy bases, and defense posts. Many of the Germans were glad to be stationed among people that they saw as polite, orderly, and peaceful. The soldiers were relieved to be on the Islands instead of being assigned to more dangerous areas on the Continent or at the front.⁶² Sibyl Hathaway, the Dame of Sark, had the Germans sign her guestbook when they came to see her and many left comments such as, "thanks for the lovely afternoon." When asked if she was embarrassed about these appreciative comments she replied, "There was nothing to be gained by opposing the Germans openly or being rude to them."⁶³

The Islanders viewed the German soldiers positively and were not afraid of most of them. Some soldiers were even trusted enough to have access to the Islands' secret newspapers which contained real news obtained from the BBC by Islanders who had access to illegal radios. The Germans sometimes tried to

protect the Islanders from their superiors. When Hitler ordered that 2,200 Channel Islanders, who were British citizens, be deported to camps in Germany in retaliation for Germans being deported from Persia, the order was delayed for over a year before being carried out. The German Commander of the Islands tried to send only healthy people who had a greater chance of survival. However, the delay may not have been for completely humanitarian reasons, but may have been partly due to bureaucratic and logistical problems.⁶⁴

German soldiers felt very safe on the Islands and one soldier even referred to the Channel Islands as “the largest air raid shelter in the world” because the Allies would not bomb the Islands due to the civilian population. The only time that the Germans stationed on the Islands saw any action was a small raid launched against Granville, France in March 1944. The main objective of this raid was to obtain coal from docked Allied merchant ships, and it was a remarkable success.⁶⁵ Another raid was planned for late April 1945, but the raid was abandoned due to the war being almost over.

End of World War II and Liberation

Liberation of the Channel Islands

World War II in Europe ended on May 7, 1945 when Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. The Channel Islands held out for two more days because the German Admiral in command of the Channel Islands refused to surrender until he had received word from Großadmiral Karl Dönitz, Hitler’s successor, that the surrender was real. The formal surrender of the

Islands was signed onboard the British destroyer HMS *Bulldog* on May 9, 1945, bringing an end to almost five years of occupation. The Islanders were ecstatic with joy as the German flags were lowered and replaced with the Union Jack. The liberating soldiers of the British Army were greeted by cheering crowds. The Germans, on the other hand, were confined to camps for several days before being marched to the beaches and loaded onto ships that took them to POW camps in the United Kingdom.⁶⁶

Islanders returning home to the Channel Islands after the War came from a variety of locations. Some were returning from serving in the military, some had been exiled in England, and others had been interned in prison camps in Germany. When the men, women, and children returned to their family and friends on the Islands, there was a variety of reactions. Sometimes the reunions were joyful, and at other times they were not. Some families that left during the evacuations returned to find that their homes had been looted by either the Germans or their neighbors. One woman, Rose Shaw, remembers that after finding furniture missing from their home, her mother went to the neighbors asking for it back. When it was returned, the neighbors explained that they had just borrowing it and were keeping it safe for the Shaws.⁶⁷ Children that had been evacuated without their parents came back speaking English with different accents and barely recognizing their parents. To pay special tribute to the Islands, King George VI and Queen Elisabeth visited the Islands and personally expressed their gratitude that the oldest part of their dominion was once again free.⁶⁸

The Germans made sure that no one would soon forget their presence. Along with building impenetrable defense bunkers, they left thousands of landmines strewn across the Islands. Most of the mines and other German ordinance were cleaned up shortly after the liberation, but some is still occasionally found, requiring the bomb squad to be called.⁶⁹

Life on the Islands returned to normal after the War, and the occupation was rarely mentioned. Children that attended school in the 50's and 60's learned about the occupation from their parents and classmates, but the majority of people tried to forget it.⁷⁰ Many Islanders had souvenirs from the occupation and in the 1960's, the Channel Islands Occupation Society was founded to help preserve the memories and artifacts from the occupation.

Conclusion

The occupation of the Channel Islands is a unique event that occurred during World War II. British civilians and German soldiers lived together on the Islands and developed a special relationship. The Islanders needed the Germans to allow safe passage for Red Cross food deliveries, medicine, and other goods essential for life. The Germans relied on the Channel Islanders to grow food for them and to coincidentally provide protection from Allied attacks. The Channel Islands and the events that occurred on the Islands during World War II are rarely mentioned in historical books or research papers. In the book *Hitler's Empire*, the author Mark Mazower mentions that the Channel Islands were occupied and that there was very little resistance, but he does not go into further detail.⁷¹

The occupation provides lessons in context; even though the occupation was a small part of the War, the events that occurred on the Islands can be used to study how the Germans treated people who lived in countries that they occupied. The Channel Islands can be studied to highlight the differences between German racial policy in Eastern and Western Europe. In Eastern Europe, the Germans wanted to Germanize the territory and conquer the land for Germany⁷² The Germans were kinder to the inhabitants of Western Europe and Scandinavia because they believed the Western Europeans were higher than Eastern Europeans on the racial hierarchy.

The occupation of the Channel Islands could be compared to other occupations in Europe to show similarities or differences. The occupations in Denmark and Belgium were similar to the occupation of the Channel Islands because the Germans treated these two countries' populations kindly and with respect. The occupations of Denmark, Belgium, and the Channel Islands can be compared to the occupation in Poland, where the Germans behaved brutally towards the local population.

The occupation of the Channel Islands affected the lives of people in different ways. The civilians living on the Islands had many choices to make as they decided whether to leave the Islands or stay and face the Germans. Germany had a small piece of the United Kingdom under their rule and used the victory both for propaganda and defense. The Channel Islands were an interesting episode during the War, where two enemies tended to live peacefully together. The result of this was that the Islanders' view of the Germans was

different from how the British viewed the Germans. Many Islanders knew that the Germans could be cruel to their enemies, but felt that many individual soldiers were friendly and similar to their brothers and fathers. When some German soldiers returned to the Islands after the War, either as husbands to Islanders or on vacation, they were treated kindly. However, in contrast, some Islanders were treated as traitors by their friends and family because they had collaborated too closely with the Germans.

The Channel Islands will always be set apart from the rest of the United Kingdom because of the unique challenges they faced while being occupied during World War II. While Great Britain will be remembered for standing alone and helping win the war, the Channel Islands will be remembered for being occupied. This doesn't mean that the Islands did not do their part. Thousands of men and women who called the Islands home served in the British military and meanwhile, the Germans were forced to spend vast amounts of resources building defenses and defending the Islands. The Islands and the Islanders were greatly affected by the occupation, but they still helped the Allies win.

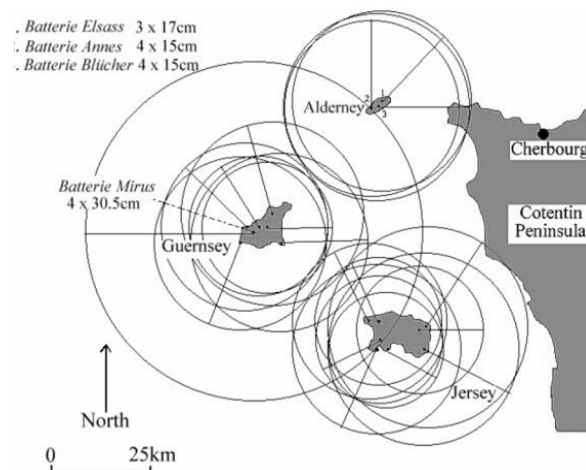
Photo Section



Bombed tomato trucks in Saint Peter Port, Guernsey.
(Tabb, II)



German soldiers inspecting a captured flag.
(McLoughlin, 41)



Map showing the range of the German coastal defense guns on the Channel Islands.
(Tabb, V)



Auguste Spitz

Marianne Grunfield

Therese Steiner

These three Jewish women were deported from Guernsey and murdered at Auschwitz in July 1942. (Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team)



The Red Cross Ship SS Vega delivering food supplies to the Channel Islands. (British Red Cross)



A postcard celebrating the liberation and explaining how the Channel Islanders felt about the Germans leaving. (Tabb, XXXII)

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- ¹ Roy McLoughlin, *Living with the Enemy* (St. John: Channel Island Publishing, 2006), 15-16.
- ² Mary Wood and Alan Wood, *Islands in Danger* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 17.
- ³ Wood, *Islands in Danger*, 18.
- ⁴ Ibid, 19-20.
- ⁵ McLoughlin, *Living with the Enemy*, 17.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid, 19.
- ⁸ Ibid, 19-20.
- ⁹ Bill Morvan, interview by Louise Morgan, July 19, 2014.
- ¹⁰ Peter Tabb, *A Peculiar Occupation* (Shepperton: Ian Allan, 2005), 54.
- ¹¹ Tabb, *A Peculiar Occupation*, 57.
- ¹² Ibid, 55-56.
- ¹³ Unknown author, "The Story of an Evacuation Hero," *BBC*, December 2, 2009.
- ¹⁴ Tabb, *A Peculiar Occupation*, 56-57.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, 59.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 59-60.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 61-64.
- ¹⁸ Rose and Mary Shaw, interview by Miles Shaw, December 3, 2014.
- ¹⁹ McLoughlin, *Living with the Enemy*, 26.
- ²⁰ Commandos were the British special forces during World War II.
- ²¹ McLoughlin, *Living with the Enemy*, 26-27.
- ²² Ibid, 28-31.
- ²³ Ibid, 30-32.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 32-33.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 33-35.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 34.
- ²⁷ Tabb, *A Peculiar Occupation*, 229-230.
- ²⁸ Jack Sauvary, *Diary of the German Occupation of Guernsey* (Saint Peter Port: La Société Guernesiaise, 2002), 27.
- ²⁹ McLoughlin, *Living with the Enemy*, 75.
- ³⁰ McLoughlin, 76-77.
- ³¹ Ibid, 100.
- ³² Ibid, 113-115.
- ³³ Ibid, 116-117.
- ³⁴ Madeleine Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands Under German Rule 1940-1945*, (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 191-192.
- ³⁵ Sauvary, *Diary of the German Occupation of Guernsey*, 214-215.
- ³⁶ Tabb, *A Peculiar Occupation*, 128.
- ³⁷ Sauvary, *Diary of the German Occupation of Guernsey*, 217-218.
- ³⁸ Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands Under German Rule 1940-1945*, 203-207.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 195-196.
- ⁴⁰ Wood, *Islands in Danger*, 73-74.
- ⁴¹ "The Jews of the Channel Islands," *Holocaust Research Project*, accessed February 17, 2016, <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/nazioccupation/channelislands.html>.
- ⁴² Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands Under German Rule 1940-1945*, 106.
- ⁴³ Ibid, 108.
- ⁴⁴ "The Jews of the Channel Islands."
- ⁴⁵ Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands Under German Rule 1940-1945*, 110.
- ⁴⁶ "The Jews of the Channel Islands."
- ⁴⁷ Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands Under German Rule 1940-1945*, 111.
- ⁴⁸ This is an honor bestowed by Israel to non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews from the Nazis.

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- ⁴⁹ Patrick Clahane, "Woman Who Hid Jewish Friend Nominated for Israeli Honour," *BBC*, January 31, 2016.
- ⁵⁰ Organisation Todt was the main organization responsible for building military defenses and supplying labor for Germany during World War II.
- ⁵¹ Tabb, *A Peculiar Occupation*, 9.
- ⁵² Wood, *Islands in Danger*, 124.
- ⁵³ Wood, *Islands in Danger*, 125.
- ⁵⁴ McLoughlin, *Living with the Enemy*, 202-204.
- ⁵⁵ Hazel Knowles-Smith, *The Changing Face of the Channel Islands Occupation: Record, Memory, and Myth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 212.
- ⁵⁶ A kapo is a prisoner who collaborated with the Nazis by supervising other prisoners.
- ⁵⁷ Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands Under German Rule 1940-1945*, 193-194.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 194-196.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 317.
- ⁶⁰ McLoughlin, *Living with the Enemy*, 121.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*.
- ⁶² *Ibid*, 197-199.
- ⁶³ *Ibid*, 66-67.
- ⁶⁴ Tabb, *A Peculiar Occupation*, 119.
- ⁶⁵ Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands Under German Rule 1940-1945*, 170-174.
- ⁶⁶ Tabb, *A Peculiar Occupation*, 191-193.
- ⁶⁷ Rose and Mary Shaw.
- ⁶⁸ Tabb, *A Peculiar Occupation*, 201.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 193.
- ⁷⁰ Rose and Mary Shaw.
- ⁷¹ Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 473.
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